

Questions and Answers from Access: Opening the Doors to Service

LEGAL RESPONSIBILITIES

Q: What does Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 require of grantees in terms of persons with disabilities?

A: Section 504 prohibits recipients (and subrecipients) of federal financial assistance from discriminating against a qualified person with a disability in any of their programs or activities. This applies to any entity that receives assistance from the Corporation, whether it be in the form of funds, services of service members or training paid for in whole or in part with federal funds, etc. Section 504 also requires recipients' programs and facilities to be accessible to persons with disabilities, and requires recipients to provide reasonable accommodation to qualified persons with disabilities to allow them to receive services or participate in the recipients' programs, as well as to perform the essential functions of their job or service position.

While these requirements may seem onerous, 78% of all job accommodations cost less than \$1000, and most cost nothing at all (President's Committee on Employment of Persons with Disabilities).

Q: I thought the Americans with Disabilities Act is what applied to my program.

A: The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 may apply to Corporation grantees. For State and local governments, the standards under the two statutes are similar. However, for non-governmental entities, while both statutes apply, the higher standards of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, which applies to all our programs and projects, govern.

Other statutes also apply. The National and Community Service Act and Domestic Volunteer Service Act are the statutes that authorize the Corporation and its programs. These statutes prohibit an individual with responsibility for the operations of a grantee's program from discriminating against a participant or staff member on the basis of a disability, if the person is a qualified individual with a disability.

Note: Regardless of whether you are talking about the Rehabilitation Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act, the National Community Service Act, and/or the Domestic Volunteer Service Act, these statutes do not:

- provide an advantage to a person with a disability in applying for a job or promotion (they only prevent discrimination against an otherwise qualified person with a disability);
- prevent an employer from using progressive discipline, including termination, when a person with a disability is not fulfilling the essential functions of the job, with or without reasonable accommodation;
- provide "special rights" to persons with disabilities (they level the playing field so persons with disabilities may compete equally with non-disabled persons); and
- guarantee anyone a job or other benefit.

Q: Who is entitled to protection under 504?

A: A qualified person with a disability is entitled to protection under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. A qualified person with a disability is a disabled person who can, with or without reasonable accommodation, fulfill the essential function of the position.

A person with a disability is defined as a person who:

- Has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities;
- Has a record of such an impairment; or
- Is regarded as having such an impairment, even though no impairment in fact exists.

Q: What types of disabilities are covered under the law?

A: Impairments include any physiological disorder or condition, cosmetic disfigurement, or anatomical loss affecting body systems. They include mental or psychological disorders and learning disabilities.

The following are excluded from the definition:

- Persons **currently** using illegal substances or illegally using legal substances
- Persons who pose a direct threat to themselves or others
- Pedophilia, transvestism, voyeurism, exhibitionism, transsexualism, gender identity disorders not resulting from physical impairments, other sexual behavior disorder, kleptomania, compulsive gambling, or pyromania.

Q: What types of doctor's proof of a disability can be required?

A: Under some circumstances you may require documentation when an individual requests a reasonable accommodation. When the disability and/or need for accommodation is not obvious, you may ask the individual for **reasonable** documentation about her disability and functional limitations.

Note: A person need not use the words "reasonable accommodation" when requesting a reasonable accommodation – for an adjustment or change in the work or service environment which is related to a medical condition. A service member says, "I'm having trouble getting to the office on time because of the medication I'm taking" or "I need six weeks off to get treatment for a back problem." A new service member who uses a wheelchair informs the supervisor the wheelchair cannot fit under the desk in the office. These are all requests for reasonable accommodation.

Q: What is reasonable documentation?

A: Reasonable documentation means only that documentation needed to: (1) establish that a person has a physical or mental impairment that substantially affects a major life activity, (2) identify the functional limitations resulting from the impairment, and (3) establish that the physical or mental impairment requires a reasonable accommodation.

Reasonable documentation describes:

- the impairment (this may or may not include the actual diagnosis), including its nature, severity and expected duration; and
- the activities the impairment limits, and the extent to which they are limited.

Some rules apply here:

- You cannot ask for documentation unrelated to determining the existence of a disability and the necessity for an accommodation. This means that in most situations you cannot request a person's complete medical records because they are likely to contain information unrelated to the disability at issue and the need for accommodation. If an individual has more than one disability, you can request information pertaining only to the disability that requires a reasonable accommodation.
- You may require that the reasonable documentation come from an appropriate health care or rehabilitation professional – doctors, psychiatrists, psychologists, nurses, and licensed mental health professional are types of appropriate health care professional, as are physical, occupational and speech therapists and vocational rehabilitation specialists.
- You may request documentation on the diagnosis, but an individual has the right to provide sufficient alternative documentation instead. For example, a person's arm becomes numb, making writing and small manual tasks difficult or impossible to perform. The person may provide documentation on the diagnosis, but you may not require the person to provide the diagnosis to you. To perform your supervisory responsibilities, it does not matter whether the cause of the numbness is a pinched nerve, nerve damage from an accident, a stroke, or multiple sclerosis. You need information on the nature of the impairment – here, a nerve or neurological impairment – as well as the severity, expected duration, and functional limitation resulting from the impairment. You may require such documentation on the diagnosis if – and only if – the disability and/or need for reasonable accommodation are not obvious and the individual has not already provided you with sufficient information to substantiate a disability and the needs for the reasonable accommodation requested.

Q: May I ask for medical documentation even though the individual has not request reasonable accommodation?

A: You should be careful not to request information if it is not directly related to responding to a request for an accommodation. Additionally and importantly, generally you must treat as confidential medical documentation of a person's disability and need for an accommodation you receive.

If you are concerned about the possible contagious nature of a person's illness, or concerned that the person may not be well enough to work or perform service, you may request a health care provider's note clearing the person to be at work. This note need only state that the person is under the provider's care, is medically cleared to be at work, and poses no medical risk to others.

Note: Since HIV/AIDS is bloodborne, such a note is not appropriate unless there is risk of sharing contaminated body fluids, such as through shared needles or receiving a contaminated blood product.

Q: How do I frame a request for documentation?

A: In requesting documentation, you should specify what types of information you are seeking regarding the physical or mental impairment, its functional limitations, and the need for reasonable accommodation. As an alternative to requesting documentation, you may simply discuss with the person the nature of the disability and functional limitations.

A request could be as follows:

[Name] is an AmeriCorps member with [name of program or project] and his/her primary duties are: [list the essential – not marginal or “nice to have” – functions of the position]. He/she has requested reasonable accommodation because of a physical or mental impairment. Please provide the following information to me within [number] days:

- The impairment (this may or may not include the actual diagnosis), including its nature, severity and expected duration; and
- The activity or activities the impairment limits, and the extent to which they are limited, especially those activities that are required for performing the essential functions of his/her position.

In addition, please identify in what capacity you are seeing and/or treating [name], (doctor, nurse, physical or occupational therapist, etc.), as well as the basis for the information you provided (personal examination or treatment, review of medical records, etc.).

Q: Are all organizations (corporate, profit, nonprofit) responsible for adhering to the ADA even if they do not get federal financial assistance?

A: It depends. The ADA applies to all employers with 15 or more employees (Title I), all state and local governments (Title II), and public accommodations as defined in Title III. Types of organizations covered under Title III include but are not limited to social services agencies and schools.

Q: What can we do as a program if our school sites are inaccessible to people who use wheelchairs or people with visual impairments?

A: Two different approaches might be needed here.

Inaccessibility for persons with visual impairments often results from lack of awareness – the possibility of head injuries resulting from protruding objects, areas under staircases, and low hanging branches unless cane-detectable objects warn of the danger; the possibility of trips or falls resulting from uneven steps or non-continuous handrails; the inhibiting of independent travel resulting from lack of Braille and raised lettering on elevators, signs, etc. A national service program which raises awareness of school officials and perhaps provides them with suggestions to achieve accessibility may be all that is needed. (Two excellent, free resources are JAN, the job accommodation network – 1-800-526-7234 (voice/TDD) – and DBTAC – the disability and business technical assistance centers – 1-800-949-4232 (voice/TDD).)

Conversely, inaccessibility for persons who use wheelchairs (or walkers, crutches, canes, etc.) more frequently is a cost issue – resurfacing a gravel or other uneven parking lot or sidewalk; ramping steps; replacing heavy or revolving doors; widening too narrow corridors, corridors, and aisles; and retrofitting inaccessible rest rooms.

Here, a national service program first needs to determine whether physical accessibility is required by the law. Was the site built before May 1979, or was it built after May 1979 but making the physical changes would constitute an undue financial burden? (School systems might have difficulty legitimately claiming undue burden, but expensive physical changes might constitute an undue financial burden for small nonprofit schools, day care centers, etc.) If so, physical changes may not be required. In these cases, suggestions for creative methods for programmatic accessibility (relocation of services, etc.) can be pursued. If physical accessibility is required by the law, a national service program can assist in identifying sources through which

the school might develop options for making the changes. (JAN and DBTAC might be good sources for any of the above.)

REASONABLE ACCOMMODATIONS/PROGRAM ACCESSIBILITY

Q: Can we only partner with sites that are accessible? Or do we just need to be certain that an applicant with a disability is matched with a site that is accessible or can provide reasonable accommodations?

A: Every recipient of federal financial assistance must comply with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. See the question above regarding accessibility requirements. The Corporation's regulations addressing nondiscrimination provide that a recipient may not, in determining the site or location of a facility, make selections that have the effect of excluding persons with disabilities, denying them the benefits of the program, or otherwise subjecting them to discrimination (45 C.F.R. § 1232.4(b)(4)). In addition, a recipient may not aid or perpetuate discrimination against a qualified person with a disability by providing assistance to an agency, organization, or person that discriminates (45 C.F.R. § 1232.4(b)(1)(v)). Therefore, any recipient of federal financial assistance which extends federal financial assistance to another organization or site is responsible for ensuring that the other organization or site complies with Section 504.

Q: Are we required to provide an interpreter for hearing impaired members? Can they have an interpreter during all their service hours?

A: You are required to ensure that hearing impaired members receive services that are as effective as those provided to persons without hearing impairments (45 C.F.R. § 1232.4(b)(1)(iii)). Not all persons with impaired hearing use interpreters – some lip read, others use auxiliary aids to enhance sounds, etc. For members for whom interpreters are equally effective methods of communication, for certain activities you probably need to provide an interpreter. This is not the same as providing an interpreter during all their service hours. In most cases, you will only need to provide interpreters when it is necessary for effective communication. This will depend on the nature of the service and what a member is doing during those hours.

Q: Can you make accommodations regarding number of service hours (i.e., less hours for pro-rated education award)?

A: Adjustment of hours is often a form of reasonable accommodation. However, you must carefully consider the circumstances and the legal requirements when adjusting hours for service members. AmeriCorps programs have statutory requirements regarding service hours, and changes to hours that violate these requirements “alter the fundamental nature of the program.” Therefore, these changes are not required for reasonable accommodation and providing them may violate the Corporation's statute.

You must first determine if your program has consistently applied these requirements to all your service members. Strict adherence to the legal requirements to deny a person an accommodation for his or her disability when flexibility is allowed for others is discrimination because of disability.

If consistently applied, the following scenarios would alter the fundamental nature of the program: (a) a full-time AmeriCorps*State/National/NCCC member who is not required to work 1700 hours (or a higher minimum established by the program); (b) an AmeriCorps*VISTA who

is not available for service 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, in the same manner as other AmeriCorps*VISTAs at that site or within that state; and (c) an AmeriCorps member who extends the time within which to complete the requisite number of hours, unless non-disciplinary suspension or administrative hold provisions are used. The existence of a disability, or changes in a medical condition, can be compelling personal circumstances sufficient to justify a pro-rated award for AmeriCorps*State/National/NCCC members.

Q: Can testing (e.g., learning disability) be part of providing an accommodation (i.e., to determine what they need)? If so, can we use Corporation funds to test?

A: No, testing is not considered a reasonable accommodation. Accommodations allow employees or service members to perform the essential functions of their positions, not to determine whether or to what extent a disability might exist or what accommodations might be needed.

Q: What types of accommodations do you need to make for people with psychiatric disabilities?

A: The type of accommodation for a person with a psychiatric disability will depend on that individual and his or her needs. In some cases, this might mean a quiet work place or more frequent breaks during the day. In other cases, it might mean adjustment of service schedules. As with all other disabilities, it will allow an employee or service member to perform the essential functions of his or her position, and therefore it is very dependent on the individual, the specific disability and how it manifests itself for that particular individual, the essential functions of the individual's position, and whether the accommodation constitutes an undue financial burden for the program's organization or alters the fundamental nature of the service program.

Q: An individual is hired, works for 1_ years, resigns, and files a lawsuit of reasonable accommodation related to PTSD (diagnosed after leaving). Can the employer be sued for lack of accommodation?

A: It would be inappropriate to address any specific matter currently in litigation. Having said that, Section 504 places the responsibility on the individual with a disability to request an accommodation from her supervisor or appropriate personnel. If a request is made and the employer refuses to provide reasonable accommodation, then the refusal may violate Section 504.

Note also that if a member behaves in a manner that would put a reasonable supervisor on notice of the presence of a psychiatric disability, and a supervisor takes adverse action against the member on the basis of the disability, or subjects the member to harassment because of the disability, these actions would violate Section 504. Likewise, if the person, although not diagnosed, is regarded as having a psychiatric disability, and a supervisor takes adverse action or harasses the person because of the perceived disability, the adverse action or harassment would violate Section 504.

Q: Where do you draw the line at reasonable accommodations for persons with mental disabilities?

A: The same standards apply to providing reasonable accommodation for mental disabilities as for physical disabilities. That is, you must provide accommodations to allow a qualified person with disabilities to perform the essential functions of his or her position, unless doing so constitutes an undue financial burden or alters the fundamental nature of the program.

Determinations of undue financial burden take into consideration factors including (1) the overall size of the organization (not just the national service program) with respect to number of employees or service members, number and type of facilities, and size of budget; (2) the type of the organization's operation, including the composition and structure of the work force and national service force; and (3) the nature and cost of the accommodation needed.

Q: How do you accommodate a person who needs a voice-activated computer?

A: If a person needs voice-activated computer software to perform the essential functions of the position, if providing such a computer does not constitute an undue financial burden, and if there is no other equally effective method to accommodate the person, you must provide him or her with one.

Q: What is reasonable accommodation for an employee benefits system operated by machine [telephone, voice response system]?

A: Recipients must ensure that communications with their applicants, employees, service members, and clients or other beneficiaries are available to persons with impaired vision and hearing (45 C.F.R. § 1232.4(e)). Therefore, systems operated by machine must be accessible to persons with all types of disabilities. It is preferable to have an alternate, human source available. Frequently, automated telephone systems include as an option pressing "0" if a person needs personal assistance. Computerized systems should have options for receiving information in text-only format. There should always be a method identified to obtain information by mail, e-mail, and FAX.

Q: Are there any written guidelines dealing with union contracts and related rules that essentially forbid reasonable accommodations?

A: The Corporation's regulations provide that a recipient's obligation not to discriminate on the basis of disability is not affected by any inconsistent term of any collective bargaining agreement to which the recipient is a party. (45 C.F.R. § 1232.9 (e)). In addition, the requirements to comply with Section 504, including the requirement to provide reasonable accommodations, may not be obviated or alleviated by the existence of any state or local law (45 C.F.R. § 1232.8). Further, a recipient of Federal financial assistance may not, directly or through contractual, licensing, or other arrangements, on the basis of disability, deny a qualified person with disabilities the opportunity to participate in or benefit from the aid, benefit, or service, limit a qualified person with disabilities in the enjoyment of any right, privilege, advantage, or opportunity enjoyed by others receiving the aid, benefit, or service, etc. (45 C.F.R. § 1232.4(b)). The latter includes failure to provide reasonable accommodations. You should consult with your legal counsel if you confront specific issues in this area.

Q: Do you manage/supervise people with disabilities as you would someone without? Do you hold them accountable to the same standards (e.g., arriving to work on time)?

A: Yes. People with disabilities should be held to the same standards as other participants. However, if a qualified person with a disability reveals he or she has a disability and requests a reasonable accommodation in order to meet these standards, that must be provided unless providing it constitutes an undue financial burden to the organization (not just the national service program) or alters the fundamental nature of the program. In some cases, a change in policy may be needed in order to satisfy that requirement. For example, a person with a disability who uses

paratransit may not be able to arrive at the designated time, but should be expected to perform the same number of hours of service.

Q: What do we do if a needed legal medication causes drowsiness that is dangerous in some workplaces?

A: This should be examined on an individual basis, with particular emphasis on the essential functions of the position. If the drowsiness constitutes a direct threat to the safety to the person or others, the person is not a qualified person with a disability. This is an extremely high standard to meet, and we do not advise programs to make such decisions without the advice of their own legal counsel. If it is an essential function for the person to drive a vehicle – not a peripheral function or a “nice to have” function – the drowsiness may cause a safety issue. Likewise, if it is an essential function for the person to operate chain saw, it might cause a safety issue. Then the issue becomes whether reasonable accommodations are available – for example, reassignment of the duties to another person.

Q: Why does the Corporation not require programs to budget money for reasonable accommodations?

A: If a program wants to budget funds for reasonable accommodations, there is no reason why they cannot do so. However, budgets for programs are usually submitted far in advance of recruitment, and most programs will not be able to predict who they will recruit and what accommodations will be needed.

DISABILITY FUNDS

Q: I've heard there is more flexibility than previously thought with respect to the use of the disability fund grants made to State Commissions? Please explain.

A: Our statute sets aside a specific amount of funds each year to help increase the participation of persons with disabilities in national service. These funds are available for two general purposes. The first, commonly known as placement and "reasonable accommodation" funds, are provided on a formula basis to State Commissions based on disability plans submitted by the Commissions and approved by the Corporation. These funds are only available to AmeriCorps*State competitive and AmeriCorps*National programs.

We are currently reviewing the way we use funds earmarked for the second general purpose, "outreach" funds. The statute authorizes outreach funds to be used to pay the federal share of (1) providing information about the entire range of national service programs (including AmeriCorps*State formula programs, Learn & Serve America, and the National Senior Service Corps) to persons with disabilities; and (2) enabling such persons to participate in national service programs. Although the federal share of the grants under this authority may not exceed 75 percent, with the grantee responsible for securing the remaining funds through cash or in-kind sources, eligibility is not restricted by statute in the same ways as the placement and reasonable accommodation funds.

Q: Are there funds available for disabled AmeriCorps*State formula and AmeriCorps*VISTA members?

A: Please see the previous question.

Q: Will this “new flexibility” affect the way disability funds earmarked for “reasonable accommodation” are currently disbursed to and through State Commissions?

A: We do not anticipate making any major changes in the manner in which we provide these funds.

Q: My program/state does not receive disability funds and we do not intend to apply for them. Does that mean that we do not have any obligations with respect to individuals with disabilities?

A: Regardless of whether a grantee has access to the reserved disability funds, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act prohibits all recipients of Federal financial assistance from discriminating against a qualified person with a disability in any of their programs or activities. This prohibition applies to the Corporation’s primary grantees and all subgrantees, and requires them under certain circumstances to make reasonable accommodation to known physical or mental limitations of an otherwise qualified applicant, employee or member, and to ensure that their facilities and programs are accessible to individuals with disabilities. If you have additional questions, please contact Nancy Voss, the Corporation’s Director of Equal Opportunity, at 202/606-5000, ext. 309 (voice), 202/565-2799 (TDD), or eo@cns.gov.

Q: How do we get disability funds for needed transportation?

A: If a member requires accessible transportation (e.g., lift equipped van) and is a participant in an AmeriCorps*State competitive or AmeriCorps*National program, this may be considered a reasonable accommodation. You should apply to your State Commission for these funds. For questions about whether disability funds are available for a particular purpose, contact your State Commission’s disability coordinator.

Q: How can federal money be used in order to make sites more accessible? Provide specific examples.

A: As a recipient of federal funds, you must comply with requirements under the Rehabilitation Act relating to the accessibility of your program’s facilities. You must comply with the basic requirements prior to receiving federal financial assistance. If you are a program funded under the AmeriCorps*State competitive or AmeriCorps*National category, you may request funds from your State Commission to assist you in providing reasonable accommodations, over and above the basic compliance requirements, necessary to place members with disabilities.

MEMBER COMPENSATION

Q: Is there any guidance addressing concerns that an individual may lose eligibility for SSI, Medicaid, or other benefits based on their receiving AmeriCorps member benefits?

A: Yes, the Corporation has prepared fact sheets on these questions. (See the enclosed information on member benefits and eligibility for other government assistance.)

Q: Have Social Security savings caps been raised by the Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act of 1999?

A: No, but the new law is intended to foster more opportunities for persons with disabilities to participate in the workforce. For more information, go to www.ssa.gov/work/legislation.htm

Q: Does the Social Security Administration count the AmeriCorps living allowance when determining eligibility for SSI?

A: For any type of AmeriCorps member other than an AmeriCorps*VISTA member, SSA considers the living allowance as earned income.

Q: How should programs be instructing members about the relationship between Medicaid and the health insurance provided to members through the AmeriCorps program?

A: Medicaid is the payer of last resort. Therefore, full-time members should obtain health insurance through their AmeriCorps program even if they are eligible for, and receiving, Medicaid benefits. Members should consult with their Medicaid agency on this.

Q: How do AmeriCorps benefits affect eligibility for SCHIP?

A: Because the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) is authorized under the Social Security Act, the receipt of AmeriCorps benefits (by any member other than an AmeriCorps*VISTA member) may affect eligibility for SCHIP benefits. Contact your state SCHIP program for more information or call 1-877-KIDS-NOW.

Q: Why can't a person with a disability use the education award for non-educational purposes?

A: The National and Community Service Act provides that the education award may be used only to (1) repay qualified student loans; (2) pay the cost of attendance at a qualified institution of higher education; or (3) to pay the cost of participating in an approved School-to-Work program. Thus, an AmeriCorps member must use the education award not only for educational purposes but also only in the three ways described in the law.

Keep in mind, however, that the cost of attendance at an institution of higher education may include, for a student with a disability, an allowance for those expenses related to the student's disability, including special services, personal assistance, transportation, equipment, and supplies. In addition, the School-to-Work program may offer a broader range of opportunities for members with disabilities to use their education award.

Q: I understand that AmeriCorps members may use their education awards not only to repay qualified student loans and to pay for the cost of attendance at qualified institutions of higher education but also to pay for the cost of participating in an approved School-to-Work program. How does the School-to-Work program work?

A: The School-to-Work program is supported by grants by the U.S. Departments of Education and Labor to States and other entities. School-to-Work initiatives involve students, parents, educators, employers, labor unions, and community-based organizations. To learn more about the program, go to www.stw.ed.gov. For the name of the School-to-Work Director in your State, go to www.stw.ed.gov/Database/statedir.cfm.

RECRUITMENT

Q: Can a competitive program get a TDD machine for recruitment?

A: Yes. A TDD machine can be purchased by an AmeriCorps*State competitive or AmeriCorps*National program to assist in recruitment efforts. It should be noted that TDD machines are not expensive. Depending on the model, they cost only a few hundred dollars.

Q: How do you advertise AmeriCorps positions that are geared toward the deaf community?

A: Here are a few suggestions for reaching the deaf or hard of hearing community:

- In your advertisements and marketing, include the International Symbol for the deaf or hard of hearing and pictures of people signing
- Include an accommodation statement in your materials
- Advertise in publications of the deaf community
- Contact interpreters in your area for ways to recruit and advertise
- Contact organizations in your area (e.g., deaf service centers) that serve the deaf/hard of hearing community for further suggestions
- Establish a liaison in the deaf community that can get you plugged into these and additional resources

Care must be taken regarding service “positions that are geared toward the deaf community.” Recipients may not deny a qualified person with disabilities the opportunity to participate in programs that are not separate or different (45 C.F.R. § 1232.4(b)(2)). In addition, recipients must administer their programs in the most integrated setting appropriate (45 C.F.R. § 1232.4(d)).

SOURCES FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Q: Could the Corporation put together a team of technical advisors to visit states and discuss marketing tools for that state’s population?

A: Our technical assistance provider (currently, Access AmeriCorps) is available for such purposes. Inquiries concerning these services should be directed to this provider.

Q: How do I find my local Center for Independent Living?

A: You can locate your local Center for Independent Living by contacting the Independent Living Research Unit (ILRU) at 1-713-520-0232 (TDD: 713-520-5136) or via their web site at www.ilru.org

Q: How do you work with vocational rehabilitation agencies to maximize benefits for individuals?

A: Each state has a vocational rehabilitation agency and, in general, there are local offices in communities/counties across the state. It is advantageous to develop a relationship with the local office and to work directly with the counselors. One way to get involved is to attend one of the local office’s meetings or inservices. Programs can arrange to give a presentation during these sessions where they focus on the long-term career opportunities in service.

Q: What agencies are available to accommodate the different recruitment and placement materials needed for people with disabilities?

A: Many methods for providing materials in alternate formats for people with disabilities are easy to do. For documents prepared on a computer, change the font to make it large print or save it in

text-only format to make it compatible with screen-reader software. Read a document into a tape recorder to make it accessible to persons who are blind. Caption any videos you make.

If you need assistance, local agencies and organizations in your state can help you provide materials for people with disabilities. The following are possible resources:

- Center for Independent Living – your local center could help put materials in Braille or on tape
- Affiliates of national disability organizations such as UCP, Easter Seals or Arc
- Your state Department of Education
- Your state agency that serves the blind or disabled community (e.g., Commission for the Blind)
- Department for the Blind library

Q: Are there any Corporation grantees that serve deaf and/or hard-of-hearing people? If so, could you supply a contact person and address or phone number for them?

A: Yes, there are Corporation grantees that serve the deaf and/or hard of hearing community. A couple of examples are:

Georgia Personal Assistance Service Corps
Catherine Ford
706-542-3907
706-542-4815 (fax)
Email: kford@arches.ug.edu

University of Alabama at Birmingham, Civitan International
Ellen Dossett
205-934-2965
205-975-0330 (fax)

For grantees in your area, contact your State Office or State Commission. In addition, there are grantees that have deaf and/or hard of hearing members.

Q: Please provide the list of Jennifer Heffron's books that were mentioned for mental health disability issues.

A: The two books mentioned were:

- *The ADA and People with Mental Illness: A Resource Manual for Employers.* This publication was co-sponsored by the American Bar Association and the National Mental Health Association.
- *Mental Disabilities and the Americans with Disabilities Act 2nd Edition.* This publication is an American Bar Association publication.

Q: Is there a listserv on people with disabilities and national service?

A: Yes. To subscribe to CONNECT-L:

1. Send a mail message to: MAILSERV@ACAD.DRAKE.EDU
2. Leave the subject line blank.
3. In the body of the message write: Subscribe CONNECT-L (Firstname Lastname)

Once you have successfully subscribed to the list, send e-mails to CONNECT-L@acad.drake.edu and your message will go to the list's subscribers.

Q: Does the Corporation have information on disability, accessibility, reasonable accommodation, and resources available for assistance?

A: Yes. The Corporation's web site (www.nationalservice.org) contains resource information. The policy statements and brochures distributed at the Access Conference are there, as is the presentation on legal responsibilities of national service programs. The end of that presentation contains a variety of resources sponsored by the federal government. (If you want that presentation in a Power Point format for use at your own training sessions, send a request to eo@cns.gov either directly or through the web site.)

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS

Q: Will there be additional conferences in the future focused on people with disabilities and national service?

A: Yes. The Corporation is determining the timing and location for the next conference.

Q: How does the Corporation plan to address the issue of bridging differences among states?

A: The goal of national service is decentralization so that states have the major responsibility of administering programs. The Corporation works with all states to help them work to their capacity and to involve all members with disabilities.

This document is available in alternate format upon request. Please contact Thea Kachoris at 202/606-5000, ext. 562 or tkachoris@cns.gov. In addition, it is available at www.cns.gov.